



F-35 Lightning II Program

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FIRST F-35 LIGHTNING II SUPT SLOT RECEIVED AT COLUMBUS AFB

COLUMBUS AIR FORCE BASE, Miss. -- Assignment nights at Specialized Undergraduate Pilot Training bases are where new pilots learn what aircraft they are destined to fly as they start their Air Force career.

History was made at Columbus Air Force Base, Mississippi, March 25, when the assignment night for SUPT Class 16-07 revealed the first-ever training slot for the new F-35 Lightning II.

Second Lt. Austin Hornsby, SUPT Class 16-07, will be the first SUPT student to receive the challenge of piloting the F-35 aircraft.

"I really wanted to fly the F-22 Raptor; I was leaning toward an air-to-air fighting mission," Hornsby said. "But I never imagined I would get this chance to fly the F-35."

The F-35 is the U.S. Air Force's latest fifth-generation fighter. It will bring an enhanced capability to survive in the advanced threat environment in which it was designed to operate. With its aerodynamic performance and advanced integrated avionics, the F-35 will provide next-generation stealth, enhanced situational awareness and reduced vulnerability for the United States and allied nations.

"The F-35 is going to do a bit of everything, so I'm really stoked for the opportunity," Hornsby said. "Not only will I get to do air-to-air, but also some air-to-ground, two really satisfying mission sets."

Many begin the journey to become U.S. Air Force pilots, but fewer become fighter pilots and even fewer still have stepped into the cockpit of the F-35.

"Ever since the Air Force Academy, I wanted to become a fighter pilot," Hornsby said. "Watching the Thunderbirds and other fighters at football games made me realize that. Flying the T-38 was the first step, and it led me on the path to something greater."

Although Hornsby exhibited great skill in all aspects of aviation, he attributed his success to the others who got him there.

"My dad was in the crowd at assignment night and was excited as I was to hear I would be flying the newest aircraft. My flight commander really went out on a limb and put his neck out on the line for our class," Hornsby said. "As a whole, our flight worked together and excelled together. That is why we succeeded."

Hornsby's journey is far from over. Although he has been selected to fly the F-35, he will first have to compete against his peers of the same skill to move on to train in the newest 5th generation fighter aircraft.

After graduation from SUPT, future fighter and bomber pilots attend Introduction to Fighter Fundamentals to prepare them for their follow-on fighter or bomber aircraft.

"I still have to compete for this spot at IFF this summer," Hornsby said. "There will be 10 slots and those 10 will compete at IFF down at Randolph Air Force Base, Texas. The top six will move on to the F-35 B-Course."



Second Lt. Austin Hornsby, Specialized Undergraduate Pilot Training Class 16-07, celebrates with his flightmates after receiving his assignment to fly the F-35 Lightning II at 16-07 assignment night on Columbus Air Force Base, Mississippi, March 25. Hornsby will be the first SUPT student ever to accept the challenge of piloting the F-35. (U.S. Air Force photo illustration/Senior Airman Stephanie Englar)